

Food Safety When the Power Goes Out

How long does the electricity have to be out in my home before I should be concerned about the food in my refrigerator?

Refrigerated food should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours. Discard any perishable food (such as poultry, meat, dairy products) that have been at 40°F for two or more hours. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food colder longer.

If the power is out for longer than two hours, follow these guidelines:

- A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours with no power. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the refrigerator, pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a digital quick-response thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40°F.

Some of the food in my freezer started to thaw/thawed before the power came back on; how do I know if it is safe to eat?

Never taste food to determine if it is safe! You will have to evaluate each item separately. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check the temperature of each food item to determine its safety. Remember, you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or a digital thermometer held next to it reads 40°F or below, it is safe to refreeze. Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but the food will remain safe to eat. See the attached charts for specific recommendations. Be sure to discard any items in either the freezer or the refrigerator that have come into contact with raw meat juices.

How can I be prepared in advance for a power outage?

- Purchase one or more coolers; inexpensive Styrofoam coolers can do an excellent job.
- Purchase some foods that do not need to be refrigerated. Examples include canned

goods, powdered milk, and dry goods, such as cereal. Use them and replace them every couple of months though so they do not expire.

- Purchase a digital quick-response thermometer. With this you can check the temperature of food for doneness and safety.

For specific concerns about food safety, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Bureau of Food Protection at 603-271-4589, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the DHHS website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.